



2015 STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS

FEBRUARY 9, 2015

MAYOR JASON L. SHELTON

Thank you (Councilman Palmer)

Gov. Bryant, Members of the Council, and distinguished guests

It is my tremendous honor and privilege to be here with you today to report on the state of our city. It is with great pleasure that I can stand here with you today and report that the state of our city is financially sound - structurally solid - historically successful and that we, as a city, are ready, willing and able to take action to ensure the future success of our great city.

I am also tremendously proud to report that with the continued support of our citizens, we have the tools, resources, and resolve to meet our future needs. We have the ability to meet our future needs because we have a great team here in Tupelo.

After a year and a half of working with our City Council, I am more convinced than ever that this group of elected officials is truly committed to the future success of Tupelo.

At this time I would like to introduce the members of our City Council:

Council President – Mr. Mike Bryan – Ward 6
Council Vice President – Mr. Buddy Palmer – Ward 5
Mr. Markel Whittington – Ward 1
Mr. Lynn Bryan – Ward 2
Mr. Travis Beard – Ward 3
Ms. Nettie Davis – Ward 4
Mr. Willie Jennings – Ward 7

Thank you to each of you for your tireless commitment to our city.

I have repeatedly stated and truly believe that the future of our city and that of the Tupelo Public School District is one and the same. And, I believe that we have the best public school system in the state of Mississippi. Thanks to the strong leadership of Dr. Gearl Loden, our principals, teachers and staff, the Tupelo Public School District continues to move forward in the right direction. The strength of the Tupelo Public School District is the single greatest tool for economic development that we have here in Northeast Mississippi.

Over 40 percent of the Tupelo Public School District faculty holds advanced degrees. These teachers are the cornerstone of our school system. Among this group of educators are recipients of presidential teacher awards in math and science, Apple's distinguished educator award in technology as well as numerous Mississippi Master Teacher hall of fame inductees.

THS students have on to attend regional universities, service academies and Ivy League schools across the nation. Most recently, two of our current seniors have been accepted to West Point and another has been named a Presidential Scholar semi-finalist. This past year, our pre-K program at the Early Childhood Education Center received the US Dept. of Education's Distinguished School Award.

In addition to outstanding academics, our high school also has an award-winning athletic program, as well as performing and visual arts programs that are recognized throughout the region.

In partnership with the Mississippi Arts Commission, our school district has a nationally-recognized arts-integration program in our Pre-K through 8th grade classes.

Like our city as a whole, our school district continues to move forward in the right direction. At this time, it is my honor to recognize our school leaders.

[Introduce Dr. Loden, school board, staff, teachers]

On April 28, 2014, the worst tornado to hit our community in 80 years caused widespread devastation to our city. But despite suffering a disaster that brought us to our knees on that Monday afternoon, I am more proud than ever to say that the City of Tupelo rose – once again – to its feet.

That resilience and determination is exactly why the state of our city today is stronger than ever before. We have emerged battered, but not beaten, and we are reunited like never before.

2 Corinthians 8:2-5 states, “They are being tested by many troubles and they are very poor. But they are also filled with abundant joy, which has overflowed in rich generosity. For I can testify that they gave not only what they could afford, but far more. And they did it of their own free will.”

In the wake of adversity, thanks to the generosity, hard work and Christian Spirit of our citizens, we have not only survived, we have thrived.

After the tornado, a record breaking number of more than 6,000 volunteers joined forces with the United Way, 8 Days of Hope and many other churches and civic organizations to begin the recovery effort.

The Tupelo Spirit was once again rekindled.

But, as tough and resilient as we are, and even with the help of over 6,000 volunteers, we didn’t do it alone. The Beatles have a hit song that has a line that says “I get by with a little help from my friends” and the same is true for our great city.

[Recognize Governor, Senators, Congressman Nunnelee (hometown hero) – State and Federal officials]

I would especially like to take this moment to thank and recognize Congressman Alan Nunnelee who was with us every step of the way. He was not just a congressman checking on his constituents, but a hometown hero fighting for his city.

As we move forward in the recovery process, the City of Tupelo continues to foster a culture of savings and a commitment to doing more with less, while still meeting our needs. This year the City of Tupelo adopted a budget that included the first budget surplus in six years.

In addition to this fiscally conservative approach to the City’s budget, we have saved in excess of \$2.5 million over the past two years which has been put toward funding our future capital needs. We currently have budgeted the funds for our 5 year capital plan through 2017 without the need to issue new debt or utilize any reserve funds and we continue to maintain the \$18.5 million in reserves that was in place at the beginning of this term.

The accomplishments are achievable because we have the best financial team in the State of Mississippi, and that team is led by Ms. Kim Hanna.

[Introduce Kim Hanna]

Tupelo has long been the hub in Northeast Mississippi for retail, business, entertainment and recreation and it is more important than ever that we continue to fulfill this role. With over half of the city’s general fund revenue coming from sales tax receipts, we must continue to be a business friendly community and

we will continue our “start with yes” philosophy at City Hall. This year, our sales tax receipts are up and we are cautiously optimistic that this trend will continue as we rebuild the North Gloster Business District and our neighborhoods.

To keep our sales tax receipts strong, we must continue to promote our city at every opportunity and that job primarily falls on the shoulders of our Convention and Visitors Bureau.

CVB

The Tupelo CVB plays a critical role in drawing business, cultural and sports related tourism to the City. In March 2014 the CVB rolled out the “Center of Positivity” campaign, creating a fresh, consistent message for inviting visitors to Tupelo. Following the tornado, they initiated a targeted marketing campaign to let visitors know that Tupelo was still open and ready for their visit and their business.

Under the leadership of Director Neal McCoy, the CVB continues to flourish as the most successful tourism office in the state. Among others, in 2014, the CVB received the Mississippi Tourism Association “Governor’s Award” for:

Tourism Office of the Year

The CVB is led by my friend and Mississippi Tourism Association Member of the Year winner Neal McCoy.

[Recognize Neal McCoy]

As a city, we will also continue to provide our full support to our partners in Economic Development at the Community Development Foundation, Three Rivers Planning and Development District, the Tennessee Valley Authority, the Appalachian Regional Commission, and others.

Our Governor often says that economic development is a team sport and I believe that this team approach is what has made the Tupelo area one of the top micropolitan areas in the United States. But even as successful as we have been, I firmly believe that our best days are still ahead.

As a city, we will continue to reach out to those business and industries that want to invest in our community and we will do our part to make sure that good, high paying jobs remain available right here at home.

We will also continue that same team approach to operating the City on a day to day basis.

If the incidents of December 23, 2013 and the tornado of April 28, 2014 taught me anything, it is that it truly does take a team to run this city.

There is no single person or small group of people making all the calls, but there are hundreds of men and women out in the field, with boots on the ground, coordinating efforts and responding to the needs of the citizens of our community.

The 450 men and women that make up the workforce of this city are the ones who take your calls, come to your door, patrol your street, maintain your parks, and keep your streets paved. From going into classrooms to teach our children about fire safety to recruiting business developers to strengthen our economy, they make sure our needs as a city are being met.

I believe the men and women that make up the City of Tupelo workforce are among the best and brightest in the state. It is an honor to serve with them each day. Today, we are operating with a leaner and more efficient staff and as a result, we were able to approve across the board pay raises without increasing our total personnel costs.

This past year in the face of adversity our team responded in a remarkable manner. In the wake of the tornado, much of the responsibility of recovery fell on the shoulders of the Public Works Department.

Public Works:

Since the tornado, the Public Works Department partnered with private contractors and has removed more than 300,000 cubic yards of storm debris from our city.

In addition to removing the trees we lost in the tornado, the Department of Public Works has also been instrumental in replanting and re-landscaping right of ways around the city. 2014 marked the 30th Consecutive year that the Public Works Department ensured that the City of Tupelo continued to receive its Tree City USA status.

In Tupelo, Public Works is the department that gets things done and that department is led by Director Chuck Williams who has been awarded the Mississippi Urban Forestry Council's Local City Government of the Year Award.

[Recognize Chuck Williams]

Parks and Recreation

As mentioned earlier, sports related tourism is a huge part of our local economy and our Parks and Recreation facilities offer our residents, and visitors, both a great quality of life and a great quality of place. This past year, our Parks and Recreation Department received 5 Awards of Excellence from Mississippi Recreation and Park Association.

This new facility received the 2014 "Travel Attraction of the Year" award by the MS Tourism Association at the MS Governor's Conference on Tourism.

Through a partnership with the Tupelo Public School District, almost 3,000 1st and 2nd graders have learned how to swim with our ongoing SafeSplash program.

During 2014, 332,000 people visited, attended, or participated in Park and Recreation programs and facilities. We hosted 43 athletic events and 12 major community events throughout the year and welcomed more than 6,200 visitors to the Oren Dunn City Museum.

Under the leadership of Director Alex Farned, great things are happening at the Tupelo Department of Park and Recreation.

[Recognize Alex Farned]

Downtown Main Street Association

In addition to our excellent Park and Recreation facilities, our Downtown continues to grow and enhance both the quality of life and the quality of place of our great city.

Continuing with the team approach in Tupelo, the Downtown Tupelo Main Street Association, partnered with the CVB, the Tupelo Elvis Festival, and Down on Main concert committee to hold a benefit for

tornado relief called Band Together. This successful event brought thousands of people to Tupelo's front porch at Fairpark and raised over \$49,000 for volunteer efforts coordinated by the United Way and 8 Days of Hope.

As a partner in economic development, the Downtown Main Street Association has helped guide more than \$100 million in private investment since 1991. As a result of the hard work of the Downtown Tupelo Main Street Association, under the leadership of Debbie Brangenburg, in Tupelo, downtown is cool again.

[Recognize Debbie Brangenburg]

BancorpSouth Arena

The State of Mississippi is the birthplace of American music and there is no place in which that is more significant than right here in Tupelo. The music scene is still alive and well right here in Birthplace of the King of Rock and Roll.

This was a record-breaking year for the BancorpSouth Arena as more than 316,000 people attended events here. The four day period between February 26 and March 1, 2014 was the busiest four days in our arena history, with nearly 26,000 people visiting the arena for 5 different events.

This past year we hosted the highest-grossing R&B show in arena history, had the most ticket sales of any event since 1994 and the most revenue for a single event since 1995.

This past year, BancorpSouth Arena Director Todd Hunt was named to the Board of Directors of the International Association of Venue Managers and joined the faculty of the organization's Facility Management School.

[Recognize Todd Hunt]

Development Services

Historically, in the City of Tupelo, there is no Department with a broader range of duties and responsibilities than that of Development Services. This department oversees planning, code enforcement, mapping, engineering, rental property oversight, building inspection, permits, and licensing. When I took office, I was amazed by all of the duties and responsibilities of this dynamic department.

When I learned that they could do it all, I thought that this would be a great time to put even more responsibility on them and we added economic development to their workload. And with this new responsibility, they have responded exactly how you would expect – by exceeding expectations in every regard.

The Department of Development Services has expanded the scope of its mission to include Economic Development efforts aimed specifically at attracting small to mid-sized businesses to Tupelo and to expanding our retail market. I believe that the dividends of adopting a friendlier development code, a start with yes philosophy, and more consumer friendly regulations are paying dividends for our city.

In 2014, we saw a 21 percent increase in commercial construction value in the City of Tupelo. We also has a total of 46 new single family homes built which is a 31% increase over the previous year.

This year, we hired a new Director of Development Services, Shane Hooper. Mr. Hooper has a strong background in economic development and has deep ties to the business community.

[Recognize Shane Hooper]

Tupelo Water and Light

Day after day, we rely on Tupelo Water & Light to literally keep the lights on and the water running.

This department has also been tasked with the responsibility to provide infrastructure to the newly annexed areas. When these projects are complete, the city will have invested \$21 million to serve our newly annexed citizens.

While still maintaining the high level of service that we have come to expect from Tupelo Water & Light, a large part of their manpower and resources were immediately impacted by the April 28 tornado. The total cost to repair damages to the Tupelo Water and Light equipment was over \$2.2 million and these repairs included the replacement 377 utility poles, 203 transformers, and over 247,000 feet of wire. The extent of the damage to this department was widespread but Tupelo Water & Light amazingly completed most of the repairs within just a few weeks following the storm. Director Johnny Timmons even called in his own reserve corp to help with the efforts.

[Recognize Johnny Timmons]

Tupelo Municipal Court

This past year, I had the honor and privilege to be able to nominate Mr. John Knight to be the Administrator of the Tupelo Municipal Court. He is the first African American to hold that position in the city of Tupelo and is doing a remarkable job. As a lawyer, I know first-hand that Tupelo operates one of the most professional and efficient courts in the state and we are optimistic that we will have a new, modern facility for our courts in the near future.

At this time, I would like to introduce our municipal court administrator John Knight, along with our court officials:

Our City Judges –
Judge Jay Weir and Judge Willie Allen.
Richard Babb - City Prosecutor
Rhonda Cole, Court Clerk

Retired Captain Larry Montgomery often said that guests come to the Municipal Court by written invitation, and those ‘invitations’ are typically delivered by the men and women of the Tupelo Police Department.

TPD Accomplishments

In January of 2014, the city began the demolition of old Milam Manufacturing building to prepare a site for the new police administrative headquarters. We look forward to providing the men and women of the Tupelo Police Department with the facilities they deserve and hope to break ground later this spring.

Tupelo Police Department was instrumental in maintaining security and aiding rescue efforts after the April 28 tornado. In the following days and weeks, the Tupelo Police Department coordinated with law enforcement agencies from all over the region as well as the National Guard to provide 24 hour protection to our most vulnerable residents, neighborhoods and business districts.

As we are all aware, December 23, 2013 was one of the darkest days in the history of our city. While it is a day that will never be forgotten, over the past year we have continued the healing process. During General Assembly, the Medal of Valor was presented to Beth Stauffer in memory of the ultimate sacrifice made by her husband Sgt. Kevin Gale Stauffer, Jr. and the Purple Heart Medal was presented to Joseph Maher for the catastrophic injuries that he sustained.

On December 23, 2014, the City held the Sgt. Kevin Gale Stauffer Memorial service at First United Methodist Church and we have established December 23 as Sgt. Kevin Gale Stauffer Day in Tupelo.

Another action taken in the wake of this tragic incident, and which was signed into law by Gov. Phil Bryant, was the passage of the Kevin Gale Stauffer Jr/ Joseph Maher Law Enforcement Appreciation Act of 2014 and I am proud to announce that the City of Tupelo, through a unanimous action of the Tupelo City Council was the first city in the state to comply with this act.

[Recognize Chief Bart Aguirre]

Tupelo Fire Department

On April 28, 2014, when the tornado hit the City of Tupelo, pursuant to our Emergency Response Protocol, Chief Thomas Walker became the city's Chief Emergency Response Officer. I cannot say often or emphatically enough what an incredible job Chief Walker did in first managing the search and rescue mission and then the Recovery effort. His leadership was exemplary on that day and in the weeks that followed. I have no doubt that were it not for the amazing efforts by the Tupelo Fire Department and everyone that assisted in the immediate aftermath of the storm that the outcome would have been much worse.

[Recognize and Thank Chief Thomas Walker]

In House Legal Counsel

In the 16 months since establishing the in-house attorney position on October 1, 2013, the city has saved \$295,000 in general and special project legal costs. This allows more tax dollars to be applied to tangible projects and services for our citizens.

Within ten days of the tornado, our attorney guided us through the emergency procurement process and drafted the request for proposals and contracts for debris removal, debris monitoring and disaster management, ensuring that we were able to receive maximum state and federal reimbursement of our costs.

In addition to these significant savings, the daily accessibility to and involvement of the in-house attorney provides more responsive and effective legal services than ever before.

[Recognize Ben Logan]

Human Resources

Of course, none of our departments would be as successful without the support of our Human Resources Department.

Two programs led by the Human Resources Department are aimed at enhancing the inclusiveness and employment opportunities for the community. The Plant-a-Seed program is offered to youth attending Tupelo High School between the ages of 16 and 19. This hugely successful program was implemented by Councilman Willie Jennings and continues with the support of the administration and City Council. It has allowed dozens of students the opportunity to spend time in the summer learning about the day to day operations of the City of Tupelo.

The next program they administered in 2014 is the National Emergency Grant program through the Three Rivers Planning and Development District. This program was initiated in response to the many workers displaced due to the April 28 tornado. Fifty NEG workers were hired through this grant program at no cost to the city.

[Recognize Cassandra Moore]

As you can see, each of our departments have had a tremendous amount of success during the past year. Each of our Department Heads do a wonderful job in guiding their departments. There is one individual however, that has the responsibility of making sure that each of the departments are working together as one team, with one mission, moving forward together. That individual is our MVP, the city's Chief Operations Officer Don Lewis.

[Recognize Don Lewis]

[Tupelo Plan]

Today, we are not here just to highlight our past accomplishments, we are here to discuss how to build on our successes. During the past year, we as a council and administration have met many times to create a roadmap for the future.

We have taken a hard look at both our strengths and our opportunities for improvement and have committed ourselves to working as a team to reach even greater heights in the future.

In developing the TUPELO Plan, we have utilized the previously adopted 2025 Comprehensive Plan, the new business friendly Development Code, our campaign platform, our department goals and goals of each of our Council members.

The first component of the Tupelo Plan is TRANSPORTATION and our goal is to "Take a comprehensive view of our transportation system."

We have some important decisions to make over the next few years and I believe that we must come together as a community to make the decision that best addresses the needs of all of our citizens. In 2014, we saw the completion of the most ambitious projects in the history of the Major Thoroughfare Program including the opening of Highway 6 and the Northern Loop. In the past 25 years, the MTP has invested more than \$100 million in the City of Tupelo's infrastructure and given us the competitive edge that we need to be successful. Simply put, good roads are good for business.

We have already began making positive changes in our transportation infrastructure.

The 2014 Mill and Overlay of Streets Program made our system for improving city streets more efficient by the adoption of a grading scale to determine which streets will receive work, based on need.

During the budget process, the City Council allocated an additional \$500,000 per year to this program. These type of smart choices and sound investments in our city's infrastructure will help make all of our neighborhoods too good to leave.

The City is also focusing on improving pedestrian right of ways. Through a grant, the City is implementing the Safe Routes to School program that will allow for more sidewalks to be built connecting residential neighborhoods to local schools.

These sidewalk projects will also allow our city to become more pedestrian friendly and provide more opportunities for fitness and recreation in the future. These sound initiatives combined with the fiscally conservative approach to funding will continue to improve our city.

From exploring public transportation options to traffic synchronization; from a quiet zone for the rail system, to travel by foot, car, or airplane, we will continue to analyze and improve our transportation options in Tupelo.

The second component of the Tupelo Plan is Urban Development and our goal is to find ways to "Attract young working families and keep current residents happy."

We will continue to work in close partnership with the Neighborhood Development Corporation to complete the redevelopment of the Jackson Street area. Recently, the NDC was successful in selling the commercial property on the corner of Jackson and Clayton to local, private investors who are in the process of renovating and developing the site into a commercial project that will benefit the neighborhood and enhance the quality of life of residents in the area.

The city will continue to work to restore those neighborhoods most badly damaged by the April 28th tornado. In partnership with the City Council, the neighborhood associations and the planning department, we have established three neighborhood overlay districts to help residents of the storm damaged areas control the quality of rebuilding work in their neighborhoods.

We are committed to these residents to make rebuilding as easy as possible and to preserving the historic character of those neighborhoods. We will also continue to use the overlay concept to continue the neighborhood by neighborhood approach to revitalization in the City of Tupelo.

Since the tornado, the Department of Development Services has issued a total of 257 residential permits with a construction value of over \$60 million for private development.

The city has also continued its own revitalization efforts. In 2014, the City of Tupelo purchased the Azalea Gardens property on Ida Street. This development had been a blighted area of this City for years. The city is now working with private developers, financial advisors and other experts to find an economically viable way to redevelop that area to better serve our community.

We are committed to the belief that every part of Tupelo should be a great part of Tupelo and we will continue our efforts to recruit homeowners to live in our city.

In the past, there has been a notion that it is less expensive to buy and live in the county, rather than inside of the city of Tupelo. I am very pleased to announce that during the past year, thanks to the Mississippi Home Corporation's "Smart Solution" program, for families making \$80,000 or less, 100 percent financing for the purchase of a new home is now available inside the city of Tupelo.

This “smart solution” program is directly available to homebuyers through financial institutions such as Renasant, TrustMark, BancorpSouth and others right here in Tupelo - which happens to be the banking and financial hub of the deep south.

There is some truth to the fact that property taxes are less in the county than in the city, but, on average, when you take the total dollars spent on taxes, insurance, utilities and other services, combined with the quality of those services, the more affordable solution is right here in Tupelo.

One such example is Tupelo’s level 4 fire insurance rating, which keeps homeowners’ insurance premiums low in the City of Tupelo. When you compare the insurance rates of those who live in the city to those who do not, you will find that the premiums can be from 25 to 33 percent higher outside of the city. This difference alone typically more than out-weighs any differences in property taxes.

The third component of the TUPELO PLAN is Public Schools and Public Safety and our goal is “Promoting the best and safest school system and city.”

I spoke about the Tupelo Public School District earlier but it cannot be said often enough how fortunate we are to have the quality of schools that we have here in Tupelo. As a city, we want to continue to do our part to support the schools in any way we can.

Last year, in addition to here at home, I travelled to Jackson and the Mississippi Gulf Coast to speak on behalf of teacher pay raises as part of a larger effort organized through the Mississippi Association of Educators. I commend the State Legislature approving long overdue teacher pay raises for all Mississippi educators to be phased in over the next three years.

Just like in Jackson, they often cannot wait on what they do in Washington, as a city, when it comes to our schools, we cannot wait on what they do in Jackson. As a city, we must commit ourselves to take the steps necessary to protect the future of the Tupelo Public School District.

Our school district is doing a remarkable job of achieving on every level. Unfortunately, the Tupelo Public School District has been underfunded by more than \$20 million dollars over the past six years under the MAEP Program. This lack of adequate funding means that the responsibility of the success of our school district rests squarely on our shoulders.

But, as our history has taught us in Tupelo, we can take the necessary steps to support our schools, administrators and teachers.

I pledge to you today that you have the unwavering support of our city, because here, we are all Blue and Gold.

The City of Tupelo has been awarded funding through FEMA and MEMA for two large-scale safe rooms and three smaller storm shelters. Each safe room will have the capacity to shelter more than 1,100 people. The monolithic dome design of the safe rooms will provide protection from wind speeds up to 250 miles per hour.

Additionally, three smaller storm shelters were approved by MEMA, and so far two of them have been installed and a third shelter is expected soon.

We will continue our efforts to make Tupelo a safer place to live for all of our residents.

The Fourth component of the TUPELO PLAN is Economic Development and our goal is to create “More jobs and a larger tax base”

Tupelo had a lot of good news about employment opportunities in 2014. As a city, there were 115 new businesses created adding more than 500 new jobs to the city. In addition to that, we have seen a number of existing businesses expand, adding quality, high-paying jobs to the region. While we are always excited to see new business come to Tupelo, it also says a lot about our community when a business that has already made an investment here, not only wants to stay but sees potential for growth.

As a city, we will also compile an inventory of all available commercial buildings in the city to market these potential locations to potential entrepreneurs. We will continue to explore creative ways to provide incentives to potential business owners – large and small – to encourage them to locate in Tupelo.

In an effort to be more responsive to our largest employer – the small business owners – we will also create a Small Business Advisory council to tell us as a city what we can do to better serve our business community.

The fifth component of the TUPELO PLAN is Low Taxes, Limited Spending, & Less Regulation and our goal is “Making Tupelo a friendlier place for businesses and homeowners.”

In 2014, the Department of Development Services handled 32 zoning actions through the review and decision processes. Of the 32 applications from the public, 30 were approved. This reflects the way the new Development Code adopted at the end of 2013 is lessening regulations on new business development and making it easier to do business in Tupelo.

In 2014, 94 percent of the applications were approved, as compared to 69 percent of applications in 2013 under the previous code.

2015 marks the 5th year of managing our capital needs through the 5-year capital plan. Fiscal year 2014 Tupelo also had a surplus in the general fund of over \$1.6 million to be used for capital improvement. That means, through our culture of savings approach, that we did not spend over \$1.6 million that was allocated in the 2014 budget.

By remaining financially strong, Tupelo has maintained its Aa2 Bond Rating which is the same rating as the State of Mississippi. The City of Tupelo is one of only 5 cities in the State that has such a rating.

The six component of the TUPELO PLAN is Openness in Government and our goal is simply to stress that “We work for you”

One of the first actions I took as Mayor was to literally unlock the doors of City Hall. Over the past year and a half, all city departments have maintained an open door policy. We have established an Accountability Task Force led by Dr. Jim Coniglio, with committee members appointed at the recommendation of each council member.

We plan to hold a series of four Town Hall Meetings over the next year to get citizen feedback on ways we can better serve you in the City of Tupelo.

We will continue to be open, accessible and accountable to all of the citizens of our community.

CONCLUSION

Two years ago, I entered the race for mayor of this great city because I felt that our city was at a crossroad, and that our future rests upon which path we, as a city, choose to follow. In the past, as we go through the “Tupelo Story” from time to time we have seen our city come to a crossroad. We have seen great difficulties, but the citizens of this All-America City, guided by the indelible Tupelo Spirit have always chosen the right path. We have always chosen the path to greater prosperity, and at this pivotal time in our city’s history, I am certain that we will again choose the right path.

From having the first paved road in the south to being on the cutting edge of embracing agricultural diversification and manufacturing; from becoming the first TVA city to being the first city in the state to conduct an urban renewal project or establish a municipal reserve fund, we have always been on the cutting edge.

In the early 1990’s, true to our city’s progressive past, we again set the standard by launching a downtown revitalization plan and passing the Tupelo Major Thoroughfare Program, which has been an overwhelming success.

The combination of the MTP and the creation of the Northeast Mississippi Water District have helped our area become the number two micropolitan area in the United States for Economic Development as recognized by Site Selection Magazine.

Since the early 1990’s the Major Thoroughfare Program has allowed the City of Tupelo to invest over \$100 million into our city. This program, if it continues to be approved, will allow our citizens over the next 25 years to invest over \$100 million in our city in this pay as you go program.

Think about that...our city, without raising taxes, without increasing our debt, without depleting our reserves and without draining our general fund, will, with voter approval, be able to invest over \$100 million into making sure that the City of Tupelo remains a vibrant, All-America City well into the future and ensuring that our citizens can have a great quality of life and can enjoy a great quality of place right here in Tupelo.

As we look back through the many successes of the Tupelo Story, one thing remains constant, Tupelo’s success over and over, is the result of dedicated, community minded citizens working together for the greater good. Our successes have repeatedly been the result of teamwork and not individual efforts. As such, in keeping with our great tradition, I respectfully submit that we, together, choose which path we will follow at this pivotal moment in our history.

To borrow and paraphrase a passage from Dr. Vaughn Grisham’s case study on Tupelo, quoting visionary Tupelo leader George McLean:

Local people must address local problems. “There is no Santa Claus in Washington, the State Capitol or the County Seat. If we want a better community, we will have to do the work ourselves. If we don’t love our community enough to get involved it will not change, because nobody else is going to come in and do the work for us.”

Let us resolve here and now to renew our focus and shared commitment to bettering the City of Tupelo. Let us commit ourselves to writing the next great chapter of success in the Tupelo Story. Let us pledge now to make this crucial effort, because as we know, there is no one to do it for us. Together, this is our great city, its future is our shared responsibility and, at this very moment, it is our time to take action.

Thank you and may God continue to Bless you, your family and our great city.